

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

FRIDAY, 12 MARCH 1948

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Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. S. J. Brassington, Fortitude Valley) took the chair at 11 a.m.

QUESTIONS.

COST OF CECIL PLAINS WEIR.

Mr. McINTYRE (Cunningham) asked the Secretary for Public Lands—

“1. What was the total cost of the Condamine River Weir at Cecil Plains?”

“2. For what purpose was this weir constructed?”

Hon. W. POWER (Baroona—Secretary for Public Works, Housing and Local Government), for **Hon. T. A. FOLEY** (Normanby), replied—

“1. The cost to date is £10,163.

“2. The Cecil Plains Weir is one of the units in the works required for the conservation and development of the water resources of the Condamine River.”

TRANSPORT FEES ON FARM MACHINERY.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny) asked the Minister for Transport—

“Is it a fact that a primary producer is required to pay a fee under the Transport Acts for conveying for a distance of over 15 miles his own farm machinery to his farm in his own motor vehicle?”

Hon. J. E. DUGGAN (Toowoomba) replied—

“If the hon. member will furnish me with more specific information I shall be happy to give him a definite reply. Meanwhile, I direct his attention to subsections 20 and 22 of section 24 of the State Transport Facilities Acts, 1946 to 1947, which provide that it shall be lawful to use upon any road any vehicle at any time—

(a) Carry any goods to or from the nearest railway station or local authority tramway station, or the nearest such station which the Commissioner has determined has suitable loading facilities.

(b) Carrying goods between places between which—

(i.) The carriage of such goods cannot be effected whether directly or indirectly by rail or by licensed service; or

(ii.) So much of the carriage of such goods as can be effected, whether directly or indirectly, by rail or by licensed service does not exceed fifteen miles.”

PERSONAL STATEMENT.

Hon. E. M. HANLON (Ithaca—Premier) (11.4 a.m.) by leave: Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that when the attention of the managing editor of the Brisbane “Telegraph” was drawn to the report that had appeared in his early edition yesterday, the newspaper took every possible means to correct it as speedily as possible. They delayed the circulation of the later edition until they could correct the statement appearing in the previous edition. It is only fair to say that when attention was drawn to the matter they did everything possible to counter the effects of the earlier publication.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION.

Hon. W. POWER (Baroona—Secretary for Public Works, Housing and Local Government): I move—

“That the House will, at its present sitting, resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider of the desirableness of introducing a Bill to amend the Local Government Acts, 1936 to 1947, in certain particulars.”

Motion agreed to.

STATE HOUSING ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

Hon. W. POWER (Baroona—Secretary for Public Works, Housing and Local Government) (11.7 a.m.): I move—

“That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to amend the State Housing Acts, 1945 to 1946, in certain particulars.”

The proposed amendment is very small. It has been found necessary because of the increased costs of building. At the present time the Act provides for a maximum of £1,000 for the construction of a wooden dwelling and £1,250 for the erection of a brick dwelling. It has been found upon investigation that £1,000 is not enough and it is proposed to increase the maximum to £1,250 in the case of a wooden dwelling and £1,500 for a brick dwelling.

Motion (Mr. Power) agreed to.

Resolution reported.

FIRST READING.

Bill presented and, on motion of Mr. Power, read a first time.

STANDARD CEMENT CONCRETE ROOF TILES BILL.

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

Mr. POWER (Baroona—Secretary for Public Works, Housing and Local Government) (11.11 a.m.): I move—

“That it is desirable that a Bill be introduced to provide for a standard specification for cement concrete tiles manufactured or sold in Queensland for roofing purposes; and for other purposes.”

There is a very urgent need for the introduction of this Bill today as the result of the shortage of galvanised iron that prevails throughout Queensland, and in addition a shortage of other roofing materials, such as fibro-cement.

For the benefit of hon. members I would point out that we have today in Queensland, particularly in Governmental works, a tremendous house-building programme. In the metropolitan area—and I heartily agree with this restriction—we are not allowed to use galvanised iron because of the tremendous shortage of this material and because it is required for use in areas that are dependent entirely on tanks for the conservation of water and in the black-soil areas, where fibrocement would not be suitable because of its liability to cracking when ground movement occurs. Because of those shortages the State Housing Commission finds that at 30 June next it will have over 400 homes without roofs. It has been stated on more than one occasion by certain people in the columns of the Press that the walls of the workshops of the commission are bulging with building materials—materials held to the detriment of private contractors.

Mr. Macdonald: That is the general belief.

Mr. Barnes: It is correct, too.

Mr. POWER: The belief is as the hon. member for Stanley said. There is a considerable number of homes without roofs and without prospect of getting roofing. I propose when this session finishes to go personally to Newcastle to investigate the position, because I am informed that they are nine months behind in supplies, and that if we placed an order for material today we should have to wait nine months for it, despite the fact that there is a tremendous amount of roofing material available at Newcastle. Notwithstanding that we could transport some of our requirements of iron and other material, we are told that we shall have to wait nine months for them. That is a pretty bad state of affairs, and is affecting not only the commission's home-building plans but also the work of private builders. I pay a compliment to the private builders of this State for having co-operated to the fullest extent with the Government. Quite a number of them have been working for us for a considerable time.

Mr. Barnes interjected.

Mr. POWER: The hon. member had better get back to the sawmill at which he was working some time ago.

As the result of a little forward planning Mr. Young, of the State Housing Commission, was able to buy 30 to 34 tons of galvanised iron from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission and although the commission itself had a number of houses unfinished without roofs a good deal of this iron was made available to private builders and for use in the country in black-soil areas. Some of it has gone forward to Cairns for the roofing of 30 houses now being built on reclaimed land in that city. The Co-ordinator-General of Public Works, who controls the distribution of galvanised iron, has approved of this plan.

I merely mention those facts so as to remove any misapprehension that may be in the minds of the general public concerning

the roofing situation. Mr. Mick O'Brien, of the Australian Railways Union, rang me the other day and wanted a roof for a house and when I told him that the State Housing Commission already had 400 houses without roofs he realised what the position was. I get repeated requests from people to provide roofs for them but that is not my job. We have not got the iron and in any case it is controlled by the Co-ordinator-General. It can be readily seen that some substitute roofing material for galvanised iron will have to be found and that action must be taken without delay.

A little time ago a photograph appeared in the "Courier-Mail" showing certain houses at Stafford and it was alleged that the flooring boards had opened so far. The "Courier-Mail" and its photographer should have made some inquiries concerning the flooring of those houses when they would have been told that the flooring boards are not nailed. The houses are completed as far as possible and the floors are covered with certain protective material, which helps to some extent.

There is no doubt that the roofing situation is very serious indeed. A number of people have promised to undertake the manufacture of tiles. Requests have been submitted to me in this connection and I have forwarded them to Mr. Young, of the State Housing Commission, and Mr. Nowland, our technical officer. I am not in a position to say whether these tiles are suitable for roofing purposes because I have not the qualification to say so, nor do I propose to set myself up as an authority on the subject. Various proposals have been submitted to the Standards Association for an expression of its opinion on the matter. There has been quite a variation in regard to the quantity and quality of the material used in the manufacture of the tiles. Inquiries have been made as to the best method of testing their effectiveness, to determine whether they would leak or not. I discussed the matter with a young man who has been laying tiles for some time. He told me that he had given up tile-laying because the tiles were unsuitable as roofing material. He explained to me that the best method of testing the effectiveness of a tile was first to weigh it, then immerse it in water for 20 to 24 hours and then weigh it again. The difference in weight would disclose the absorptive capacity of the tile and would indicate whether it would leak.

It is important that a uniform or standard tile should be adopted and already the Standards Association of Australia have given serious consideration to the matter. Private builders have the same difficulty as the State Housing Commission in obtaining roofing material and it is the duty of the Government to afford a measure of protection to home-builders in this respect by seeing that an inferior article is not sold to them, one that has no value, one that will not keep out the rain, otherwise these home-builders would incur a considerable loss when later on they have to re-roof their homes. Therefore it has been decided that

all tiles for roofing purposes must conform to a standard set out in the Bill.

It is my intention to take the Bill to the first-reading stage so that hon. members may have a copy of it to peruse. The most important part of it is the standard or specification prescribed by the Standards Association which is contained in the measure.

Mr. Nicklin: They are approved by the Standards Association?

Mr. POWER: Yes, they have been approved by the Standards Association. We also propose to take power under the Bill by order in council from time to time to vary those standards. I understand that the Standards Association is continually making scientific tests with respect not only to tiles, but to other materials. If upon investigation, the Standards Association recommends a variation of the standard proposed—its members give some study to the subject before making a recommendation—then, in order to obviate the introduction of another Bill to vary the specification according to that recommended by the Standards Association, we propose to accomplish the variation by order in council.

The Bill also provides for penalties for breaches. I will go more fully into that phase of it at a later stage on the second reading, by which time hon. members will have had an opportunity of perusing the Bill.

That is all that is in the Bill. All it really intends to do is to provide a standard tile, which must conform to the specification of the Standards Association and also the specification as regards breaking strain. We believe that is necessary in view of the shortage of roofing material such as galvanised iron and fibrolite, in order to give some protection to people who are now using tiles in large quantities. There is no complaint at all as to the quality of tiles supplied by such manufacturers as Wunderlich Ltd. and Hardies, but there are other manufacturers of tiles who we believe should conform to some standard. The Government believe that tiles should be manufactured according to some standard, in view of the fact that they will be used to a much greater extent in the future because of the shortage of the materials I have mentioned.

Mr. BARNES (Bundaberg) (11.22 a.m.): This Bill indicates one of the serious positions that has arisen in Queensland. It has arisen by no other reason than a plot. Three and a-half years ago in Bundaberg the master builders held a meeting in reference to the shortage of building material, and invited me to be present. I was one of the last speakers that night. There were 40 or 50 builders present, and I opened up by saying, "What I am going to say is going to offend some of you people, because you are politically opposed to me. What I am going to tell you is what is going to happen in the future." In short, I told them this. "If you think you are in trouble with reference to shortages for building material, you are making a big mistake. You are on clobber today and do not know it. When I say that I

mean that as bad as things are today, it has no comparison with what it is going to be in the future, because it has been designedly caused to create mere confusion amongst the people. In two or three years' time you will find how bad things are." At that meeting I assumed, by looking at the appearance of the faces of those assembled, that I had offended some of them. I could see Jones was mad with me, that Smith was mad also, and that Brown a little further along the seat was seeing my point but hoping I was wrong. After that meeting some of my friends said to me, "Smith was mad with you, etc." Twelve months after that meeting the same person said to me, "Smith said, 'By God, Barnes told us this 12 months ago.'" Since then it has been said that Barnes told them this three years ago. I am not a clairvoyant, nor am I psychic, but I know the plans of the international plotters who arranged these shortages. I told you years ago, when the papers blazed four-column headlines about shortages of building material, that applications had been made by friends of mine to get people out of the Army to produce building material. You will remember my telling you particularly of one of these persons for whom an application was made. Efforts were made for years to get that individual out of the Army. He was stationed at Southport, and in those five years all he did was to go from Southport to Caloundra.

That was his total war effort in five years! Application was made for his release from the Army in order that he might produce material for building, but he was not allowed to go to work in an essential industry. As I told you seven years ago, that is done purposely so that the people will not have homes over their heads, so that when the fateful hour comes they will be more disturbed and confused and then revolution will follow.

To prove that what I am saying is correct, the other day statistics came out that showed that Bundaberg produced more houses pro rata of population than any other country town in Queensland. Bundaberg produced more homes in proportion to population than any other town in Queensland because three years previously told them of what was happening and taught them to develop their extra initiative and get things for themselves. The result is that Bundaberg is in a different position from where you people would like it to be. Bundaberg has built more houses in proportion to population than any other country town in Queensland. I told them on the soap box that I would take the blame for the flying foxes and for the fact that the town clock stopped, but I would take the credit for Bundaberg's having the most houses built.

Mr. Burrows: So they should have; you have been working in a sawmill for the last 12 months. (Laughter.)

Mr. BARNES: There is one thing certain: you could not work in a sawmill because you would not have sufficient intelligence to do so.

A Government Member: That is very weak.

Mr. BARNES: That applies to you, too.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. BARNES: This position has not arisen accidentally. For example, a certain firm—not a Bundaberg firm—wanted a permit to release 10 tons of iron. Because I belonged to that town in my early days they came to me and as a friend asked me to see what I could do about it. I said, "If you want iron I will get you iron if you are willing to pay £6 a ton extra for it." He replied, "I will not pay black-market prices for iron." I said, "I am not asking you to pay black-market prices, I am asking you to pay £6 a ton export duty for it; and wait until I am finished and you will find out what it is for." I said, "You will get a permit to get 10 tons of iron—the equivalent of roofs for 20 houses—if you will agree to get the iron with the object of shipping it out of the country. They will give it to you then." The result was that despite the fact that families are homeless this particular person got a permit to ship 10 tons of iron out of this country. He got a friend in Sydney to take delivery of that iron—and he could have taken delivery of 200 tons if he had had a permit provided it was to be sent out of the country—he took delivery and sent the iron to Queensland. This is a No. 1 racket. Then there was the case in which the parson at Newcastle—

Mr. Burrows: That is not the bloke who had a meeting in Bundaberg a couple of nights ago?

Mr. BARNES: A parson, dill, in Newcastle.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. BARNES: A parson, dill, in Newcastle.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member cannot refer to any hon. member except by his correct title. I ask him to do that.

Mr. BARNES: This parson in Newcastle asked the wharfies to strike in preference to loading 200 tons of galvanised iron that was to go to the Islands—to go out of the country when Australian women and their kids did not have shelters over their heads. When a parson asks people to strike it is a very serious state of affairs. In Newcastle today you can buy as much iron as you want to—unlimited quantities.

There is an unlimited quantity of iron if the Co-ordinator-General in Queensland will give the permit to buy the iron. It is not a matter of a shortage in Newcastle but of not getting a permit from Queensland and the Co-ordinator-General is responsible to this Government and this Government are responsible for the fact that women and kiddies are homeless in Queensland. That is because their Co-ordinator-General will not

issue the permits to get the necessary iron to cover our people. That is No. 1 racket in Queensland but there are others.

The Minister in charge of housing stands in this Chamber and tells us another angle to the story, the tile story. If the hon. gentleman was "fair dinkum" he would see that this iron came to this particular State; he would see to it through his Cabinet that the Co-ordinator-General issued permits to get the iron into Queensland. If what I am saying is not correct I will resign from Parliament. That is how crook the iron business is in this State and, not only the iron business. Nothing goes through this Parliament unless it goes through at the direction of the international plotters, nothing at all, just as the Bill went through this House the other night. The Queensland People's Party and the Country Party ridiculed the Bill, telling the Government they already had the power under the State Transport Facilities Act and had not used it and then they voted them more power. That Bill was designed to cause a bloody revolution. These men talked against the Bill and voted for it because they get their direction. The happenings in Czechoslovakia will be here in a short time.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member is getting away from the Bill.

Mr. BARNES: No, Mr. Mann.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. member to confine his remarks to the matter of building.

Mr. BARNES: I will finish by saying that the Czechoslovakian position will be here in a very short time because this, as well as many other methods, is forcing it on this country.

Mr. CHALK (East Toowoomba) (11.33 a.m.): I agree with this Bill so far as it has been explained this morning by the Minister in charge of housing but I reserve the right to make any comment on it after the first reading.

I am particularly concerned at the statements made by the hon. member for Bundaberg and his attack on the handling and control of iron in Queensland and iron coming to Queensland. The position is: some months ago I spoke against the managing director of Lysaghts, Mr. Parry-Okeden, in this Chamber and drew the attention of hon. members. . . .

The CHAIRMAN: Order! We are dealing now with the standardisation of cement concrete tiles.

Mr. CHALK: I will put it this way then. In passing these specifications to bring about standardisation in concrete tiles we cannot allow to go uncontradicted statements that the necessity for the Bill arises because iron is being shipped out of this country. I know that the Co-ordinator-General of Public Works and the Galvanised Iron Merchants' Association of Queensland have been doing everything possible to get iron to Queensland. A couple of weeks ago one

thousand tons of galvanised iron was available for Queensland and this iron would have assisted the Minister in charge of housing in the building of homes in this State. Mr. Baldwin did everything he possibly could to get that iron here. The Galvanised Iron Merchants' Association sent their president to Sydney to see whether something could not be done to get the iron sent to Queensland. The whole difficulty at the moment is shipping and not, as was contended by the hon. member for Bundaberg, its being exported from the country.

What is more, arrangements have been made now to rail trucks of iron to Queensland as soon as the railways resume working. I suggest to the Minister that immediately the present rail difficulties are settled and the huge amount of motor transport that is now working is made available, we encourage that motor transport to go to Newcastle to bring to Queensland her quota of iron that is already there.

Hon. W. POWER (Baroona—Secretary for Public Works, Housing, and Local Government) (11.36 a.m.): The hon. member for Bundaberg has proved that he does not know what he is talking about when he says that ten tons of iron will cover 20 roofs. The fact is that it takes one ton of iron to cover a roof.

I wish to inform the hon. member for East Toowoomba that I intend going to Newcastle and taking the Under Secretary with me to investigate the position. I understand that there is a good deal of material down there that can be made available to Queensland. I do not know the reason why it is not sent here. I believe that shipping has something to do with it, but I understand also that there is something wrong with the ordering system, that when orders are placed one has to wait for eight or nine months before getting delivery.

I can assure hon. members that I realise the seriousness of the position as it affects not only the State Government but private home-builders as well. Those people who are wanting to build homes are entitled to the fullest possible protection, and I feel sure this Bill will have the support of all sensible hon. members.

Mr. BARNES (Bundaberg) (11.38 a.m.): The hon. member for East Toowoomba has said in effect that this parson in Newcastle who asked the men to go out on strike is a liar.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I do not intend to allow the debate to develop into an argument about parsons in Newcastle or anywhere else. I intend to confine the debate to the matter before the Committee. The Bill deals with a standard specification for cement concrete tiles, and I ask the hon. member to confine his remarks to that matter.

Mr. BARNES: And so far as this material that we are so short of, whatever it may be, is concerned, I will guarantee to land 100 tons of it in Queensland for the Minister if he will give me the permit.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. BARNES: If I cannot do it I will resign from Parliament.

Motion (Mr. Power) agreed to.

Resolution reported.

FIRST READING.

Bill presented and, on motion of Mr. Power, read a first time.

STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

Hon. V. C. GAIR (South Brisbane—Secretary for Labour and Industry) (11.41 a.m.): I move—

“That the Bill be now read a second time.”

There is nothing I desire to add to my remarks of yesterday when introducing this Bill. I stated then that it was a very small Bill, which provided for the appointment of a single commissioner in lieu of the commission of four as provided for in the Act and that it was also to give to the commission authority to buy and sell electrical plant, equipment and appliances. Those are the only principles of the Bill and I move its second reading.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of the Opposition) (11.42 a.m.): As the Minister has stated this Bill contains only two principles, the first that of replacing the present commission with one commissioner and the second of extending powers of trading to the commission. To the first principle we offer no objection. It is a principle that has been established in this State in regard to the Main Roads Commission, the State Housing Commission, and the Transport Commission and works satisfactorily. It has advantages over a commission of more than one member for the reason, in the first place, that you can get speedier decisions. You can get quicker action with one commissioner than if you had a number of commissioners to take the responsibility; you also have the advantage that if anything goes wrong you know where to pin the responsibility.

I should like to pay a tribute to the work accomplished by the State Electricity Commission since it was established. There is no doubt that a great deal of the credit for that work must go to the Chairman of the commission, Mr. Cochran, who now will be the Electricity Commissioner after the passage of this Bill. When the commission first started operations in this State electrical development in Queensland was in its infancy but now, as a result of its operations, extending over approximately 11 years, we have a plan for the electric development of Queensland that is now beginning to operate. Admittedly very much more could have been done had it not been for the intervention of the war; since the war there has been a world-wide shortage of necessary machinery and material required for the extension of

electricity throughout the State. The set-up we have in this State is almost unique; in one section of the State private companies have operated under the commission and in other parts of the State there are the various regional boards.

Personally I have no complaint to find with the existing set-up, especially in the south-eastern part of the State, where we have an efficient private company very rigidly controlled by the State Electricity Commission, but I think there is urgent need for greater consideration for the rural areas of the State. Under the present arrangement the base loads provided by centres of population to a very great extent carry the extension of electricity into rural areas. The City Electric Light Co., which has the franchise under the State Electricity Commission, could possibly give greater attention to the extension of electricity facilities in country areas, especially where no great amount of expenditure is involved for material. I know that there are shortages of material such as wire, insulators and the like, but numerous little extensions could be carried out. When I refer to little extensions I mean extensions for short distances that do not involve a great deal of expenditure. I know that the State Electricity Commission, and its chairman, Mr. Cochran, have every sympathy with the extension of power to country areas, and I trust that in the future Mr. Cochran will give close attention to the matter of extending electricity facilities as far as it is humanly possible in country areas with the amount of material available.

One of the greatest needs at the moment is to keep people on the land to increase production, particularly the primary production urgently required by the other countries of the world. It has been pointed out time and time again in this Chamber by hon. members on this side that nothing will do more to bring about a more happy and contented countryside, thereby bringing about rapidly increased production, than a cheap supply of electricity. I know that the Minister appreciates the situation, and I trust that he, as Minister in charge of the department, in conjunction with the Commissioner, Mr. Cochran, will give very early attention to the matter of reviewing the possibility of greater and more numerous extensions of electricity supply into country areas.

Mr. Gair: It is desirable.

Mr. NICKLIN: It is very desirable, as the Minister says, and I am sure that he will do everything possible in this connection, because there is considerable concern as to whether at the present time it is receiving the attention that it deserves.

Now let me come to the second principle of the Bill, that of giving the commission itself power to trade. The principle has already been adopted in the case of regional boards—they have the power to trade. Although there may be some difference of opinion on this matter, the fact remains that the principle has already been laid down, and I think the same principle should be extended to the commission itself, seeing that

the commission is the central authority exercising jurisdiction over regional boards, which already have the power to trade in electrical appliances.

There is another phase of trading that I take it will be carried out by the commission. That is, one of the functions of the commission is to purchase all electrical machinery for regional boards particularly. I do not know whether prior to the introduction of this Bill the commission has had the power of purchasing machinery for regional boards although it has been doing it. Mr. Cochran was able to make advantageous arrangements during his trip overseas, not only in regard to the supply of generating machinery, and power-house equipment but also in expediting its delivery. That is one factor that is holding up further electrical development in this State.

We all hope that the change in the set-up of the State Electricity Commission will lead to greater electrical development in this State. We hope also that the present bars to electrical progress in Queensland, which have definitely held up electrical extension, will be removed by a greater supply of material. We were led to believe that there would be a big industrial development and a big increase in output from industries after the war but we have found that output has been on the down grade. Many circumstances have brought that about, of which we all know. We hope that they will soon be overcome and that materials required so urgently for electrical development will come forward and that the Commissioner will be able to put into effect the plans for the complete electrification of this State. Those plans will be in safe hands when they are in the hands of Mr. Cochran who has amply demonstrated during the last 10 or 11 years that he has been gifted with a vision to deal with the big job envisaged under the State Electricity Commission Acts. I commend Mr. Cochran's appointment as single commissioner and I repeat that I hope it will lead to a prompt and rapid development of electricity and its use in this State.

Mr. HILEY (Logan) (11.53 a.m.): We on this side of the House are exceedingly interested in the Government's serious proposals for the electrical development of this State. The establishment of regional authorities, the setting-up and strengthening of the State Electricity Commission, and other steps that have been taken, lead us to believe that a material contribution will be made to the rapid extension of electricity not only in the densely populated parts, but, as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, in the marginal areas so that as the years pass the least favoured parts of the State will command all the benefits and facilities electricity brings.

My own feelings are exactly the same as those of the Leader of the Opposition. Here we have one of those rare—and all the more welcome—Government instrumentalities that are able to show some vision and approach their subject with some speed. It is commonly believed that Government instrumentalities become accustomed to move with the

ponderous slowness that characterises most of the operations of a Government at work. While one recognises that there is a tremendous distance to be travelled under this scheme there is evidence that in the field of electrical development there is a feeling of purpose in this Government instrumentality. When you start a new venture like this policies must be enunciated and laid down. In determining policy there is wisdom in having a number of heads to consider and weigh which is the best course to follow. But when the policy is laid down the work of those in authority becomes more dominantly one of administration.

There I believe is the real key to the justification for this step. I believe it is beneficial to have a multiple commission in the first year or two of its existence but when the regional boards have been set up and a real start has been made and the policies have been evolved I believe the administration of the State Electricity Commission's affairs are better handled by a single person. You cannot command the same facility of administration if you have three or four people who must make a decision collectively as when you have one single mind to approach. At this stage a single commissioner in preference to a multiple commission is a move that commends itself to me.

Directly you have a single commissioner occupying the office, which involves travelling not only throughout the State but to other States in Australia, it becomes administratively necessary to ensure that you have deputies charged with authority, so that in the absence of the commissioner your administration does not stop till his return. I believe again that that principle is reasonably approached in this Bill. I have no doubt that in the course of administration practice, if it is found that the authorities that will attach to the deputies do not prove sufficient, the Minister will very readily come to the House and seek such additional authority as will ensure that the administration will carry on without disturbance during the absence of the commissioner.

Other principles that arise in the Bill relate to the powers of the commission to itself trade in goods. I remind myself that this was a matter to which the House gave earnest consideration when the regional authorities were set up. There was a feeling that the power vested in regional authorities to trade and invest in equipment would mean virtually the socialisation of the distribution of electrical goods throughout the State. While that possibility may still be incipient, all I can say is that to date I have seen no evidence of any active socialisation of the distribution of electrical goods by these regional boards. I am rather assured to hear the Minister tell us that the real purpose of seeking this power today is to enable the commission to act as a buying agent, particularly for buying plant for the various regional boards. That purpose strikes me as being a very practical approach to the problem. I know something of the difficulties that attach to negotiating the supply of heavy items of electrical plant and equipment. Every manufacturer, not only in

this country, but throughout the world, has orders piled up on him to keep his plant operating for months and in some cases for years ahead. It may mean that by the means proposed here some regional electrical authority may obtain something more quickly because of the practical course of providing for greater purchasing facility. That purpose commends itself to me.

The last principle contained in the Bill I find I incline to question a little. When we set up the regional electricity boards many of their decisions were made subject to the approval of the State Electricity Commission. We gave those boards all sorts of authority but we said to the boards, "Although you must pass resolutions to exercise this power, you have to have the imprimatur of the commission—the approval of the commission—before you can give effect to your desire." This Bill seems on the point of procedure to go further than what we have laid down because it enables the commissioner to direct a regional authority as to what it should do.

Here we have perhaps a faint, nevertheless to some degree a parallel, illustration of a principle that exercised this House so much yesterday, that is, the question of the degree to which the central administration should be entrusted with the power of direction of the local boards. I do not say that the principle in this particular application occurs to me as something to which I should blindly object, but having regard to the very considerable discussion that took place in this House yesterday on the question of parliamentary interference with local powers, we should at least not fail to notice this last principle contained in the Bill. Personally, I should like to hear from the Minister when he is replying just what led him to include this principle in this Bill, the kind of difficulty that arose that needs correction.

I must confess that the greater the experience I have of government at work, the greater regard and respect I have for local administration of local problems, and because I have that regard I am not over-hasty in seeking to put in the Bill a general authority that enables the central commission to direct regional boards that they must do this, that, and the other. It appears to me that the principle contained in this Bill would permit that to be done, and, as I say, I should like the Minister when replying to give the House a clear indication of the need for that power of direction and the sort of problem he hopes to overcome by providing it.

Mr. BURROWS (Port Curtis) (12.2 p.m.): I agree with the suggestion that the system of having one commissioner as against three will have the tendency to expedite the approval of certain work, and particularly do I welcome it if it will increase the possibility of giving country areas more particularly the amenity to which they are rightly entitled. In country areas at present the supply of electricity is limited to the towns, and even in the towns they are limping along with some obsolete plant handed over by the various local authorities. In that matter the

regional boards must get a good deal of sympathy. I believe they are genuinely trying to extend the supply of electricity wherever possible.

The speaker who has just resumed his seat is concerned with the right of the commissioner to direct regional boards in certain cases. From my experience I think such a power will be necessary. In my district we have had a warning by certain members of the regional board that there will always be the necessity to discriminate between certain towns in tariff charges. I think the time will come—I sincerely hope it does not—when it will be necessary for even this Parliament to make a direction to regional boards that they must not discriminate between towns in respect of supplies. At the present time the Capricornia board has differential rates for various towns. That is more or less understandable and may be overlooked.

If we take the basic rate as 100 per cent. in Rockhampton, then in Monto it is 166 per cent. This means that a man living in Monto has to pay 66½ per cent. more for his electricity than the basic-wage-earner in Rockhampton, although the basic wage of both men is the same. I appreciate that the cost of running the more or less obsolete power house at Monto is considerably higher per unit than the cost of running the Rockhampton power house, but I say emphatically when we arrive at the day when electricity is supplied from one generating station there will be no justification whatsoever for charging a consumer who lives 10 miles from the power house any more than is charged to the person who lives next door to it.

An example of what should be done may be taken from the Post and Telegraph Department where we find that the cost of sending a telegram is the same whether it is lodged in Brisbane, Cunnamulla, Mount Isa, or anywhere else in Queensland. If regional electricity boards will not recognise that principle I suggest that they be directed to do so.

In addition to the fact that failure to recognise this principle means discrimination against wage-earners in different towns, there is also the fact that it discriminates against certain towns in that any person who wishes to establish an industry that will consume a large amount of electricity will go to the centre in which the power houses are situated, so that instead of having the much desired decentralisation we shall have even greater centralisation.

Mr. KERR (Oxley) (12.8 p.m.): The Leader of my party has outlined our views on the principles contained in the Bill and I do not propose to say anything except that it is my belief that the more we can extend electricity throughout the State the greater will be its development, with consequent greater rate of production and improvement in the cost of living.

The question with which I propose to deal could perhaps be more adequately raised in Committee, but I draw it to the Minister's attention now so that he will have a greater

opportunity of considering it. The provisions dealing with the matters that disqualify a person from being able to hold the position of commissioner leave room for his being able to hold shares in a public company or a company of 20 or more shareholders. Let me say at the outset that I do not for a moment hold any doubts whatsoever about the commissioner. I hold him in great regard. I consider him to be a man of the highest integrity and greatest moral character and probity.

I think some protection should be given to him to preclude him from holding shares in any public, private, or registered company whatever. I think the commissioner himself would look upon this as the right thing to do, because it is conceivable that no protection is afforded him. It is quite easy for an unscrupulous commissioner holding shares in, say, the City Electric Light Co. or some such big company or company dealing with electrical equipment, to use his office for his own advantage, and in the course of time receive dividends as a result. I repeat that I have no fear in regard to the present commissioner, but I think for his own benefit some provision should be made, and I accordingly ask the Minister to give reconsideration to the provision in the Act so as to preclude the commissioner from being a shareholder in any undertaking whatever.

Mr. PLUNKETT (Albert) (12.11 p.m.): I have no points to raise in objection to the Bill, but I should like to mention what I think are some anomalies that exist with regard to the carrying of current to various rural areas. We all appreciate the fact that there has been a shortage of materials, such as wire, in this business, but I have heard several complaints in my district nevertheless. Electrical people down that way have been doing a lot of work in extensions of power as well as lighting to rural areas. These concerns are pretty big plants, but there is the suggestion of their leaving the district and going elsewhere, where they would have more users of current. The impression has gained ground that it is not so much a question of shortage of material as that companies are not so much interested in the smaller distribution of current, as in other parts of Southern Queensland where there is a great demand for it. That feeling is a growing one. I myself think that the shortage of material has a lot to do with the matter.

I have no objection to the commission's being allowed to trade. Several of our butter factories have current running past their doors and are anxious to electrify operations. In the first place, to conduct operations by means of electricity would do away with the existing coal-dust menace, and in addition to having a cleaner system for operating, you would also obviate engine breakdowns. At Beaudesert we have been for the last couple of years wanting to have the factory electrified, but there is no electric motor to be had. When we approach the sellers of the current to help us to get an electric motor they say that they do not trade.

If the distributors of electric current are interested also in the sale of electrical equipment and appliances it may be that electricity services will be extended more quickly in the future than they have been in the past. I have already acknowledged that there is a great shortage of material and I know that if one orders an electric motor one is lucky to get it in 18 months and even then the one that you require the least may come first. I am hoping that as time goes on and the commission has the authority to trade many of the existing difficulties will be overcome.

I hope the Bill will be the means of having electrical equipment provided in rural areas and, what is more, that the people will be able to get the electric current that they were led to believe would be available to them in a year or so. Because of the shortage of material and consequent inability to get power quite a number of people are not able to carry on their operations to the fullest extent. They were led to believe that it would be made available to them within a reasonable time and if it was provided they would be much happier than they are today and we should not be getting the complaints that we do about the lack of it.

Mr. THEODORE (Herbert) (12.17 p.m.): The people that I represent are vitally interested in having electricity extensions in their areas. They look forward to a supply of electricity to provide them with some of the amenities enjoyed by more fortunate people in the cities and towns. They are anxiously awaiting the extension of this scheme.

Only a week or two ago I was in one of these outlying districts in my electorate where transmission lines are now being erected. Industries have already been established and I am sure that their production could be trebled by a supply of electric power. The people in close proximity to the transmission lines will get electric current almost at once but the people living some distance away and perhaps only a few miles feel that they may still have to wait some years before they will be connected. That delay will be caused largely by the shortage of necessary materials.

Mr. Sparkes: They have to be imported.

Mr. THEODORE: Yes, materials must be imported.

Mr. Cochran, the chairman of the commission, made arrangements for me to interview some members of the commission. I gave them my ideas, together with the ideas of some others who have a thorough knowledge of the possibilities of North Queensland, including the implementation of the Tully Falls proposal. I have spoken on this matter previously. I considered that some small plan would have been entered upon with respect to the Tully Falls scheme, something on the lines of the Barron hydro-electricity scheme at Cairns, which could have been a much larger one had its authors visualised the demands that would be made on it in the course of a few years. My idea was that they would do such a job even if the cost was considerably more than that of the smaller

scheme. In all these schemes, particularly as they apply to North Queensland, we must look ahead and provide for the expansion and increase of population.

Mr. Cochran is held in very high esteem by the people who have come in contact with him and discussed matters associated with the job he is doing. The people have great confidence in him. He is fearless and is prepared to submit to his superiors plans which I know can be successfully carried out. I believe that in the set-up envisaged under this Bill Mr. Cochran will be able to work just as efficiently, and perhaps more effectively than previously, for he will not have to call the board together before making a decision. Mr. Cochran can always delegate inquiries to his technical advisers. They can carry out preliminary investigations and upon those investigations Mr. Cochran can make his decisions.

I look forward to a very early and considerable expansion in the electrical scheme to cover the rural areas in North Queensland. I am concerned about the rural areas—it does not matter where those rural areas are, whether they are in North Queensland or elsewhere—because it is from the rural areas that we derive the greatest benefit. That is how we shall build up a great nation. No nation can become great if it has not cheap power and plenty of it. The sources of supply to provide cheap power in North Queensland are limited. We are not like some countries with snow-capped mountains that provide unlimited supplies of water. We have limited resources for the supply of power in North Queensland, but even this will be a great advantage and will mean a great deal to that wonderful and rich part of the State.

North Queensland and North Australia attracted great attention during the war from strangers coming to this country for the first time and seeing their potentialities for themselves. We can develop our nation's resources only by tackling and not talking about them. I believe that in the appointment of Mr. Cochran as sole commissioner of this undertaking there will follow some rapid and worth-while developments.

I know there is great discontent owing to the delay that we have experienced since the war ended. People expect miracles to happen but we realise that certain things occur that militate against the carrying out of such projects. Mr. Cochran has pointed out to me that although the generating plant for which he placed orders in London will be supplied approximately at the stated time, other essential materials will be much longer delayed. When you tell people that they think you are only stalling, I know that Mr. Cochran is genuine, I know he is sincere, and I know he is desirous of doing his best to carry out his job, which is necessary for the future safety of this country. No-one could do more than Mr. Cochran, I am sure. I believe in the Bill, and although it gives great responsibility to this man, I am sure our confidence will not be misplaced.

Mr. SPARKES (Aubigny) (12.27 p.m.): I am pleased to see the Bill and I hope, in

common with other Country Party members, that it will mean an extension of electricity to rural areas. Some time ago I was taken to task when I placed electricity among the most important things for the development of our rural industries.

The hon. member for Herbert said that unfortunately in Queensland we had no snow-capped mountains. Even in America, where they have snow-capped mountains, we find thousands of miles of transmission wires carrying electricity generated from coal. In America I saw electricity in the most out-of-the-way places. I think Australia lags behind virtually every other civilised country in the supply of electricity in rural areas.

Mr. Duggan: You are well served in your area.

Mr. SPARKES: The hon. gentleman is simply frivolous when he talks like that. The hon. gentleman knows that in my area, which is one of the richest in Queensland, you would not find half a dozen farms, once you get out a little, that have power. The hon. member for Herbert wants to see it throughout the length and breadth of the rural areas; and that is what I want to see. It is going to be one of the great factors in inducing our people to remain on the land. It will have a great influence, not only from the point of view of power for the farm machinery, but for domestic machines such as vacuum cleaners that will ease the labour of the housewife.

I appreciate the appointment of Mr. Cochran. He has a very big job ahead of him, but I feel sure he is the man to do the job. The people of this State have the greatest confidence in him. We know that it is very difficult to get the various items of machinery. We know, for instance, that the poles have been up in some areas for nearly 12 months.

It is very difficult to convince the farmers there that the power cannot be supplied because of the lack of wire and other things. After all, they appear to be such simple things and of course the farmer thinks that the poles were put up just before the last election and something else will be done about it before the next election. I feel sure the Minister appreciates the importance of electricity and what it means in country areas and will do everything possible to get it into the country districts as soon as possible.

There is also the important point on which I hope the Minister will agree with me, that if electricity is to serve the people as it should there must be a levelling-off process in the price of power. I feel sure the hon. gentleman appreciates that.

Mr. Theodore: The price must be reasonable in the country areas.

Mr. SPARKES: That is the real crux of the position. If electricity is to be supplied to the farmer but he cannot afford to connect up with it he is just where he was.

Mr. Devries: He will not be able to use it and he will not.

Mr. SPARKES: He cannot use it because it would be impossible for him to do so. I found that in the United States of America there was a levelling-off process in the charges for the sparsely settled areas. I was surprised at what I found. The United States has a population of 140,000,000 people roughly as compared with a handful of people in Queensland but some of its areas are very far from towns. In one of the outback places in the almost desert State of Arizona I happened to be in a farmyard. The farmer was showing me his apparatus for lifting a beast off the ground. I asked him whether he was going to lift the whole carcass and all he had to do was to press his foot on a little button alongside him and up went the beast. I was astonished at the contraption and he explained that it was all possible because of electricity. That is an instance of some of the great benefits that could be conferred on our rural communities, but of course it all depends on the cheapness of the product. I know the hon. member for Gregory is well acquainted with areas where settlers live two or three miles distant from the main transmission line but it would cost between £500 and £600 for them to connect. That is an absolutely impossible position. I am only four miles from a transmission line and should like to get the use of electricity for myself and my neighbours but have been informed that it will cost almost £1,000 to get a connection. I shall be very interested to observe the Minister's approach to this aspect of electrification of our rural districts.

As I have said in this House before, important as irrigation is—and it is a wonderful thing—electricity is essential. I know I shall not be expressing the opinion of many of my colleagues when I say that the greater part of Queensland does not lend itself to irrigation under present circumstances, until science is able to discover a means to stop the great absorption and evaporation that occur at present, unfortunately for Queensland, in the great dry inland areas such as those represented by the hon. member for Gregory and others. People who have been in those areas know of the grave difficulties the people have to face. It is very easy to visualise lovely green fields.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I would remind the hon. member that this Bill has nothing to do with irrigation.

Mr. SPARKES: I quite appreciate your call, Mr. Speaker, but I was showing the difference between electricity and irrigation in the country under present conditions.

I shall be one of the first to congratulate the Government if they are able to bring about the electrification of the rural areas of Queensland.

Mr. MULLER (Fassifern) (12.35 p.m.): Those of us who were in this Parliament when the State Electricity Commission Bill was introduced in 1937 have been disappointed at the slow rate at which electricity has been extended to country areas. We realise, of course, that the war has intervened and delay has been caused by conditions over which we have had no control,

but it is still true that the extensions in many important agricultural districts have been slow. I appreciate also that it is difficult for a central body to understand fully all the problems with which country districts have to contend.

I join with other hon. members in expressing my gratitude for Mr. Cochran's tolerance during the whole of this time. I have discussed the matter with him on several occasions, and must admit freely that he has been most tolerant and courteous and made every possible effort to help us. At one time supplies of material delayed progress. At another time shortage of man-power was the trouble. Many factors have intervened to delay the extension of electricity.

Nothing should command the Government's immediate attention more than the extension of electricity to country districts. Although we have heard much in recent years about decentralisation, I have come to the conclusion that this has been merely lip-service. I am led to this belief by the fact that the various amenities bestowed upon the community from time to time have been confined more or less to the cities and larger towns. If the Government are hoping to encourage people to stay on the land, one thing they must do is provide the country with a supply of electricity. When we compare the amenities enjoyed by people who have a supply of electricity with those available to people who are not served with this power, we can readily understand why people leave country areas to go to the city. As the hon. member for Aubigny has said, the convenience that electricity means to the women in the home is so great that the people are willing to sacrifice many other things to get this amenity.

At 12.38 p.m.,

Mr. DEVRIES (Gregory) relieved Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Mr. MULLER: Some parts of my electorate have had irrigation for a number of years, but the use of tractors, oil engines and other forms of internal-combustion power have proved too costly. Those who are fortunate enough to benefit from a supply of electricity have been able to reduce their overhead costs tremendously. In addition, a tractor, as well as being costly in the first place, soon depreciates virtually out of existence when left out in the weather. With electric power, however, it is a totally different matter.

Regional boards, the State Electricity Commission and the City Electric Light Co. have seen and appreciated the many advantages to be derived from extending electric power to rural areas. The fact still remains that there are several of our good agricultural districts that have up to date been denied electricity. When approach is made to the company concerned—the company that has the franchise in that area—almost without exception the reply is, "We are as much interested in the district as you are but so far we have not been able to get the necessary supplies of poles, wiring and other things required to do the job."

I think that the Government could play a greater part in this business in the future. We hear of many schemes submitted and we hear of money being provided for the purpose of increased production. I have in mind that the Commonwealth Government are going to provide £250,000 for five years to increase the supply of dairy produce. All the ideas in the world are being submitted to the Commonwealth Government as to how best to use that money. It is my candid opinion that there is no means of increasing and encouraging production at a faster rate than by supplying the people with electricity. I think that if the States and the Commonwealth Government got together and endeavoured to provide some money to speed up the extension of transmission lines to country districts we should be able to steady the drift from the country to the city more effectively perhaps than by any other thing previously attempted. The drift is serious. Within the last year or two an effort has been made to encourage people to remain in the country, but when you compare the amenities of the country with those existing in the cities you are deprived of all argument whereby you might convince the people that they should stay in the country. I believe that the lack of electricity is coupled so much with the drift of population from the country to the city that Parliament is entitled to give it special consideration. I hope that the Minister, besides introducing a machinery Bill to facilitate supplies, should provide sufficient money to make electric current available to country districts.

Mr. MACDONALD (Stanley) (12.44 p.m.): I should like to make a contribution to this debate as my attitude on the question of electricity is well known. Firstly, I take advantage of the opportunity to join with fellow members in paying a tribute to the courtesy and efficiency of Mr. Cochran.

In this debate we have heard many reasons advanced as to why the reticulation of electricity has been held up in this country but although to a great extent this delay is attributable to war activities I believe the root of the matter is in the approach to the subject. On every possible occasion the Government approach the matter from an economic angle and that, I say, is wrong. When the matter of reticulating current comes up the question asked is whether it will pay. The matter is approached solely from the economic angle whereas I regard it as the greatest social question confronting the whole of this country, and I believe that the Commonwealth should contribute in no small measure to the electrification of the rural areas. We know, particularly you, Mr. Devries, and others who represent western areas, that with perhaps the exception of Longreach it would be uneconomical to reticulate current and power throughout that western country. It would not be right to ask country people and wool-producers in that area to be contributors to the scheme but not beneficiaries under the scheme to reticulate current.

Another undoubted advantage that would accrue to outside areas would be that there

would be seasonal labour there on which to draw for shearing or other station work. It is the bounden duty of the State Government, and the Commonwealth too, to join with local authorities in providing these facilities, which are essential if we are to retain people in country towns. As you are well aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, every three primary producers in the country support seven others, five in the cities and two in the country towns. It is wrong to ask the primary producers to bear the burden of providing the amenities of these people in country towns.

I have already stated time without number that I am not a Socialist but I believe the time is ripe for this Government to approach both the Brisbane City Council and the City Electric Light Company with the object of taking over from them the distribution or reticulation of electricity. It should not be regarded from the economic point of view but from the social point of view. That is the crux of the whole situation.

Hon. V. C. GAIR (South Brisbane—Secretary for Labour and Industry) (12.47 p.m.), in reply: At the outset I should like to express appreciation of the very kindly references to the chairman of the commission, Mr. Cochran, for the very efficient, industrious and capable manner in which he has discharged his duties. As Minister in charge of the State Electricity Commission it pleases me considerably to know that hon. members without exception hold Mr. Cochran in such high regard. What they have said of him is true. I have found him to be a most industrious and efficient officer and I am sure that the State Electricity Commission and its work are in very good hands under his direction.

I am in entire accord with the advocacy of hon. members for the speedy reticulation of electricity throughout the State. I entirely agree that it is indispensable to and inseparable from the development of any country. Just as water is essential to the social life of any people, so electricity is essential to the development of the State in its many phases, particularly the industrial, and we must look forward to a greater and more speedy reticulation of electric power.

I appreciate the difficulties of people in rural districts and I understand the great need for the reticulation of power to those areas. I assure hon. members that every effort will be made by Mr. Cochran and me to see that the work is speeded up to the limit. Unfortunately, there are many impediments in the way of greater activity in this connection, the chief of which is the difficulty experienced in obtaining materials. It is a very real difficulty, not an imaginary one, and I am sure that most hon. members understand it.

During the war years, which numbered six, the work of the State Electricity Commission and the reticulation of power were greatly impeded because of the lack of manpower and materials. Since the war, unfortunately, the production of things required for the reticulation of electricity has not

greatly improved and we are still experiencing great difficulty in obtaining those essential materials. Plant, as everybody knows, is almost unprocureable. We never miss an opportunity to place orders for insulators, wire, and all the other essentials to which I have referred.

In brief, I can assure hon. members who have spoken on this matter that their advocacy will not be lost sight of. I repeat that I am as anxious as they to see that the requirements of the people, particularly the people in the country, are met with a supply of this indispensable social element. It is something that will be a great boon to them in their work, apart from the great help it will be to the housewife. We have reached the electric age. We shall find in a few short years, when electrical appliances are in greater supply than at present, that most of our homes will be equipped with electric appliances. We shall have our electric refrigerators, heaters, washing and ironing machines, as well as all those other things which mean so much in reducing the labour of the housewife. They are things which increase the standard of living of the people. The standard of living is not measured entirely by wages and working conditions. It is largely measured in the comfort they enjoy, in addition to the things that are vital to existence. When the position in the supply of materials improves and we are able to give the people in outside districts this power to which they are entitled, and which they badly want, we can look forward to greater production in those places. It will all mean improvement and the greater development of Queensland.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. GAIR: That being so, we can classify it as a very urgent and necessary work. The Commission will give that matter the attention it deserves.

The hon. member for Logan raised the question of a clause of the Bill giving the commission power to direct electric authorities. He thought that it was the desire of the commission to interfere with the local autonomy or control of regional boards or authorities. I can assure the hon. member that that is not our desire at all. In any case, you will see by the Bill that the direction can only be made with the approval of the Executive Council. The real intent of that clause is to ensure uniformity in trading practices and ensure methods of regional boards. Hon. members all know that it was the intention of regional boards to engage in the trading and selling of refrigerators, electric washing machines, and other electric appliances.

That is the intention of the regional boards, when these things are procurable. Today, unfortunately, they are in very short supply and the commission had great difficulty in obtaining any refrigerators at all in Queensland; and it was almost necessary to beg a southern manufacturer to supply some for a far north-western district, particularly round Cloncurry, where people need some facility

of that kind. The temperature in the Cloncurry area is very high, particularly at Christmas time, and they were in distress because the ice-manufacturing plant failed and they had no ice or refrigerators—you can imagine what sort of a Christmas they had. The idea is to ensure uniformity in business methods and practice. Unless we do this we might have one regional board selling electric appliances on terms of repayment as to time and interest rates which would be at variance with those offering by other regional boards, and at variance also with sound business practice. It is very important that we should lay down some uniform policy for them to carry out. That is the only intention of that clause. The hon. member for Logan and other hon. members can be assured that there is no intention or desire on the part of the State Electricity Commission to interfere more than is absolutely necessary with the local autonomy or control of regional boards.

The matter raised by the hon. member for Oxley will be dealt with when the Bill is in Committee.

Motion (Mr. Gair) agreed to.

At 2.15 p.m.,

Mr. SPEAKER resumed the chair.

COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

Clauses 1 to 5, both inclusive, as read, agreed to.

Clause 6—Repeal of and new ss. 5, 6, 7, and 8: Disqualifications from office of Commissioner—

Mr. KERR (Oxley) (2.17 p.m.): I move the following amendment:—

“On page 3, line 50, after the word ‘persons,’ insert the words—

‘which is neither an electric authority nor a company engaged in any way in the electrical industry.’”

During the second reading I foreshadowed and explained the reason for this amendment. The commissioner will be really the sole arbiter on all contracts. More or less sole responsibility rests in him now as to the acceptance of tenders and that kind of thing, and it is only reasonable to suggest, and I am sure the commissioner, whoever he might be, particularly the present one, will appreciate the suggested amendment.

Hon. V. C. GAIR (South Brisbane—Secretary for Labour and Industry) (2.17 p.m.): The amendment is quite acceptable to me. I think it is a very desirable precaution, and although under existing circumstances there is no necessity for it, we do not know what tomorrow may bring. If Mr. Cochran left his present office, some of his successors might be interested in some company associated with electricity or the sale of electric plant, apparatus or appliances. In the interests of the commissioner himself it is very desirable he should be free from such companies, so as to remove the possibility of any

suggestion of impropriety or that he is using his office to influence trade for some company in which he is interested. For these reasons I think the amendment is desirable, and am very happy to be able to accept it.

Amendment (Mr. Kerr) agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I wish to point out to hon. members that on page 5, line 46 of the Bill there is a typographical error. The line reads, “For electric supply.” It should read, “For electricity supply.”

Clauses 7 to 11, both inclusive, as read, agreed to.

Clause 12—Amendment of section 25; other powers and duties of the commission—

Hon. V. C. GAIR (South Brisbane—Secretary for Labour and Industry) (2.21 p.m.) I move—

“On page 7, after line 31, insert the following paragraph—

‘Provided that the said paragraph (e1) shall have operation and effect so as not to prejudice or affect an agreement or any term provision or condition of an agreement entered into by the Commission with an electric authority under this Act.’”

Under the Act the commission has already made agreements with certain electric authorities, the City Electric Light Company Ltd., and the Toowoomba Electric Light and Power Company Ltd. Those agreements make provisions for some of the things contained in this clause. Unless we accept the amendment I have now moved, this Bill will conflict with the agreements that have been made, and we want to avoid that.

Mr. Aikens: You are validating the agreements that have already been entered into?

Mr. GAIR: No. We want to guard against this amending Bill's destroying the agreements.

Mr. Kerr: You are preserving the sanctity of the agreements already entered into.

Amendment (Mr. Gair) agreed to.

Clause 12, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 13—Repeal of Schedule I— as read, agreed to.

Bill reported with amendments.

THIRD READING.

Bill, on motion of Mr. Gair, read a third time.

MARRIAGE ACTS AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (2.26 p.m.): I move—

“That the Bill be now read a second time.”

This Bill, as I explained in the initiatory stages, provides for the tightening

up of definitions in connection with deputy registrars and district registrars. In addition it provides for the validating of certain acts performed by the registrar of marriages under certain circumstances. It has been suggested that we might be able to help people in country centres by enabling registrars in particular centres to issue birth certificates immediately upon the birth of a child. That of course would be a difficult matter to operate throughout the whole of the State because it is only a district registrar who can issue a birth certificate. In Queensland we have the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages and 36 district registrars. Those 36 district registrars of course can issue birth certificates. Under this Bill we are allowing assistant registrars to take down particulars of births but difficulty would arise in the immediate issue of certificates. We issue certificates for a variety of purposes, including the purpose of enabling mothers to submit them with their applications for the maternity allowance. At one time there was difficulty because of the method adopted of collecting particulars of birth and we found for instance, that one person was registered but his brother or sister was not registered at all. There was difficulty in tracing such births and getting the required particulars for the certificates, for the purpose of the old-age pension or for other purposes, when it was found that there had been no registration of the birth. However, all these things have been tightened up. Immediately upon the birth of a child the doctor attending the mother or the matron in attendance can send in the particulars of the birth on the specified form and these are recorded and kept. There is a complete check on all births throughout the State and there are few difficulties because all the particulars come in. In the early days all the particulars were not available and there was some difficulty in having all births registered in the proper way. That caused great trouble later on when certified copies of birth certificates were required.

That is all there is in the Bill.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of the Opposition) (2.31 p.m.): As the Attorney-General has explained, this is a measure to improve the machinery relating to the registration of births, deaths and marriages throughout the State. It is essential that we should have the most effective machinery for the purpose that we can possibly get. I take the opportunity of paying a tribute to the method used in this State, to the correctness of details, and to the ease with which it is possible to get particulars of the registration of births, deaths and marriages. I pay a tribute to the way in which the records are kept by the Registrar-General, especially those in respect of soldiers. There is a separate record of particulars of every person who enlisted in World War I and I believe in World War II, although I cannot be sure of World War II. However, full particulars of all persons who enlisted in World War I are kept, and this enables the Registrar-General

and his officers at any time to provide whatever particulars are needed. It is a very valuable record, and it will become more valuable as time goes on. It is essential that all these particulars be recorded correctly, because in later years they are required for many important purposes.

I understand from the Attorney-General and from the Bill itself that the second part of the Bill dealing with the Marriages Acts is to validate some marriages that were performed apparently irregularly by a registrar who had been transferred and whose powers were limited. It is only right that we should remove any doubt in respect of any marriage that may have been celebrated, but apparently we are doing it well and truly by the Bill because I notice that the Bill says that "every marriage so celebrated shall be deemed to be well celebrated" (laughter). We seem to be making a proper job of the thing now and perhaps at the Committee stage the Attorney-General will explain what is meant by "well celebrated." We approve of the principles of the Bill.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (2.34 p.m.): I welcome the Bill as far as it goes, but I am bitterly disappointed that it does not go as far as I think it should go. When the Attorney-General introduced the Bill he gave us as comprehensive an explanation of it as he could, but I really thought that it would have included a provision wiping out what is to me the obnoxious declaration provision embodied in the right of a registrar to celebrate a marriage.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! I suggest to the hon. member that these observations would be more appropriate on the Committee stage.

Mr. AIKENS: Thank you Mr. Speaker, I will accept your suggestion.

Motion (Mr. Gledson) agreed to.

COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

Clauses 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Clause 3—Amendments of 19 Vic. No. 34; District registrars—

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (2.36 p.m.): I want to take the opportunity of making the remarks that I intended to make on the second reading, which Mr. Speaker suggested I should make on this stage. I am going to appeal now to the Attorney-General, before this amending Bill goes through and becomes law, to wipe out the obnoxious section in the Act that before any citizen of Queensland can be married by a registrar as at the present time he must first make a declaration that he conscientiously objects to being married by any minister of religion or that there is no minister of religion available to perform the ceremony. To my mind those prohibitions in the original Act are obnoxious to me and obnoxious to every free and decent citizen in this State. When all is said and

done, the marriage ceremony is a State contract as between man and wife, and the man and wife enter into this State contract and the State contract is registered by the State by the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths and Marriages. If either party to the marriage contract breaks the marriage contract, then the State and not any theological institution steps in and compels the offending party to live up to his responsibility and obligations in accordance with the marriage contract. If the husband deserts the wife, no theological organisation steps into the picture and compels the husband to maintain the wife and any children of the marriage. The State steps into the picture on the application of the deserted wife and compels the husband to face up to his obligations with regard to the maintenance of his wife and children. If either of the contracting parties, either the wife or husband, offends the law—as laid down by the State, I emphasise, and not by any theological institution or organisation—then the laws of the State are called in to give release to the one who it considers has been offended. Consequently, in view of the fact that a marriage is a State contract between a man and wife registered by the State and protected by the whole of the force of law of the State, I see no reason why if a man and woman want to get married they should have to go along to a district registrar or any other registrar according to this Bill and make a declaration along the lines of an affidavit that they conscientiously oppose being married by any minister of religion, or, on the other hand, make a declaration that there is no minister of religion available to perform the ceremony. Why should they have to make such a declaration? Why cannot a man go along to either the district or any other registrar and say, "This woman and I want to get married, and consequently, Mr. District Registrar," or "Mr. Deputy District Registrar," as the case may be, "we want you to perform the ceremony."

Why should it be necessary for those two consenting parties to the marriage to make a declaration before the registrar can perform the ceremony? Why should they not have as much right to approach the registrar and ask him to marry them as they have to approach any member of any theological organisation or denomination?

I appeal to the Attorney-General to include in this Bill a provision to wipe out the provisions of the original Act which, as I have stated, are particularly obnoxious to me.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (2.41 p.m.): I do not know just what the hon. member calls "obnoxious." If a person desires to get married in the religious rites of any church, he is at liberty to do so under the law.

Mr. Aikens: He has to make a declaration first?

Mr. GLEDSON: No, he is at liberty to get married under the rites of any church by going along to the Minister, and that declaration is signed by the contracting parties and the minister. It goes to the Registrar-General

and it is registered as a marriage according to law. If they decide that they do not want to do that, if they want to go to the registrar, they can do so and similarly make a declaration, which is signed in the same way as it is signed in the church.

Mr. Marriott: What is the wording of the declaration before the registrar?

Mr. GLEDSON: The wording of the declaration sets out that they are conscientious objectors to being married in any other way, and they ask to be married under the law by the Registrar-General. That is just as binding as a marriage in a church.

Mr. Aikens: I am not questioning the marriage by the registrar. I only object to their having to complete a declaration before the registrar will marry them.

Mr. GLEDSON: There is nothing wrong with the declaration they sign, as far as I can see. It sets out that they have conscientious objections to being married in a church; and they come along to the registrar to get married. There is no difference. They are married by the Registrar-General, or the district registrar in some part of Queensland. They are married just as though they had been to a church.

Mr. Aikens: It is quite O.K. after the registrar marries them?

Mr. GLEDSON: No-one objects to these forms because they are the forms used in connection with their marriage.

Clause 3, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 4 to 7, both inclusive, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

THIRD READING.

Bill, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a third time.

FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS (TITLES TO LAND) BILL.

SECOND READING.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (2.46 p.m.): I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

As I pointed out on the introductory stage, this Bill is one to enable foreign Governments to hold land in the State of Queensland. It gives power to the Governor in Council to set out conditions under which such land shall be held and also provides for the registration of the land and the title to be given to it. The Governor in Council can set out that one of the conditions in the holding of that land will be the exemption of it from land tax and rates, provided that the country from which the consular or diplomatic agent comes has a reciprocal arrangement.

Mr. Morris: A reciprocal arrangement?

Mr. GLEDSON: This is only done if that country does the same for our representative there. That must be done. This

Bill is being passed by the Commonwealth and I understand by the different States.

Mr. Morris: The reciprocity is laid down in the Bill?

Mr. GLEDSON: It is in the Bill. Where the Governor in Council is satisfied that any land held in any country outside the Commonwealth by, or by an accredited agent of the Commonwealth for any diplomatic, consular or official purpose of the Commonwealth is, by virtue of being so held, wholly or partly immune from all or any of the taxes and rates charged upon land under the laws of that country, then, for the purpose of granting a like immunity in this State, the Governor in Council may, by order in council exempt any land in Queensland. That is the reciprocal arrangement entered into with the other countries.

Mr. MAHER (West Moreton) (2.48 p.m.): The matter that concerns hon. members is whether Queensland and other States are to give foreign Governments the right to acquire freehold land for the purpose of an embassy, diplomatic headquarters or residences for their officials and such foreign countries are acting reciprocally towards the Commonwealth should we desire to do the same thing in their country. This is a new departure from established custom—giving the right to a foreign Government to acquire any land in any Australian State for the purpose of an Embassy or residence for its representatives. Let us take an example. If Poland wished to acquire freehold land in this country for such purposes, what is the attitude of the Polish Government if the Australian Government wishes to acquire freehold land in Warsaw or elsewhere in Poland for the purpose of establishing an Australian embassy or residence for the Australian representative in that country?

Is there reciprocity, or are we merely acting generously to other countries and taking the chance whether they will grant us similar rights if we should be disposed to use them? I did not hear any explanation from the Attorney-General on the introduction or on the second reading of the Bill, nor is there anything contained in the Bill that makes that point clear.

Admittedly, there is reciprocity on the question of immunity from rates and taxes. Once this Bill becomes law there is nothing to stop Russia or Czechoslovakia, Poland or any European slave State today from acquiring land in the Commonwealth for its embassies and residences of their officials. But what is going to be the position if the Australian Government want to acquire freehold land in any of those countries for the establishment of Australian embassies and to house our diplomatic corps? I should like to know whether Australia is doing all the giving and holding out the generous hand to foreign countries or whether those countries have in turn agreed to grant us similar rights or whether, when this legislation becomes law, our Australian Government are willing to bargain with them. In other words, even though this Bill becomes law, will the Australian Government say to any foreign

country that wants representation here that it can acquire freehold land here for the purposes of its official representation only on condition that it will grant similar rights to the Australian Government in its lands?

Mr. Morris: The Attorney-General said that is included in the Bill.

Mr. MAHER: But I fail to see it. All I can see is that there is to be reciprocity in the matter of immunity from land tax and rates. I do not see any reference to any reciprocity in the actual acquisition of land, and that is an important omission. We have no guarantee that we might not give to some foreign Government the right to freehold land here and, having established itself here, at some later date we may require to establish an Australian embassy in that country and it will not say, "No, we are sorry. Even though you have been good enough to allow us to come to your country and acquire freehold land, under our laws, which are binding on us and which we do not propose to alter, we cannot give you the right to acquire freehold land in our country."

Mr. Kerr: You could not hold freehold land in Japan prior to the war.

Mr. MAHER: And they could not do so here, either, then. I am not opposed to the Bill so long as it cuts both ways, so long as the Australian Government are prepared to bargain with any foreign country that wishes to acquire freehold land in Australia, but if it is going to be one-sided, and we are going to act as the rich uncle from Fiji with foreign countries and give them generous rights in our own country and they are to be able to refuse us when we want similar rights in their countries, it is not satisfactory. Reciprocity must be the basis of any such transaction. I know that the promotion of good will between countries is desirable, but I do not want to feel that we support today without protest a Bill that gives a foreign country the right to acquire freehold land in Australian territory for its representatives while it can deny the same privileges to us. There is nothing in the Bill to clarify that important point.

I should like to have some information from the Attorney-General on that aspect of the matter. I know it was in the minds of the hon. members for Enoggera and Sandgate when they asked the Attorney-General questions by way of interjections. The Minister in his reply said that there was immunity from land tax and rates on a reciprocal basis, but the main point, of course, is whether these agreements are going to cut both ways, and these countries are prepared to concede to us what we are so generously conceding to them.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingburra) (2.56 p.m.): The thing that has agitated my mind since I saw the Bill is a principle more vital than the one raised by the hon. member for West Moreton. I agree with him that there should be some degree of reciprocity in these matters, but I looked through the Bill to see if there was any mention of a sanctuary or harbourage. Many years ago the Australian

Government decided to erect a monument on the banks of Botany Bay, Sydney, to the memory of the French explorer, La Perouse, and fenced the monument in. I suppose most members of the Committee have seen it; the land in question would not cover more than a couple of perches. As a gesture to the French Government the Australian Government contemplated handing over the land on which the monument stands to the Government of France and the Bill to do this almost got through, when some constitutional authority pointed out that if that land on which the La Perouse monument stands was vested in the French Government it would offer a sanctuary and harbourage to every criminal in the Commonwealth. He could go onto the land at Botany Bay and no law could touch him until he had been extradited in accordance with international law or an agreement with the French Government. I am wondering whether or not this Bill might provide a sanctuary for Australian criminals.

Suppose, to use the case quoted by the hon. member for West Moreton, that the Polish Government acquired a bit of freehold land in Brisbane, and on that land established an embassy or other building. Suppose also that an Australian criminal—Polish or a man friendly with members of the Polish Embassy—goes on the land, is it going to be necessary for us to go through the whole process of extradition to get him off the property and bring him before an Australian court of law? I am sorry that our legal friends are not in the House today. The hon. member for Bowen is ill and confined to his bed. I am sorry that the hon. member for Toowong is not here, because he is always particularly sound on constitutional matters.

I hope that those responsible for the drafting of this Bill will take that important principle into consideration before asking us lay members of Parliament to agree to the Bill. That is the point I wish cleared up, as well as that raised by the hon. member for West Moreton. His point was a very good one, and I commend him for raising it. But I want the very important point cleared up whether freehold land held in this country by foreign powers will offer a sanctuary or harbourage for Australian criminals.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (2.59 p.m.): We were hoping that this Bill would be delayed for some days to afford us the opportunity of going into its principles generally in a more careful way than has been our opportunity up to the present. It is a very important Bill and there are many principles behind it.

The Attorney-General stated that it was intended to pass similar legislation through the Parliaments of the other States, but in the light of Australia's experiences in recent world wars and the conditions obtaining in countries of the world today, I think we have to be very careful about legislation allowing representatives of any nation to come to Australia and in every State establish consular and diplomatic quarters on its own freehold land.

We seem to be extending a very wide invitation to all the nations of the world but are similar opportunities to be extended to this country in return? The other countries of the world have not the land tenures enjoyed in this State.

Let us face up to the matter right away. In Russia, for instance, where could we get any freehold land? In this Bill we propose to allow any country of the world to establish its diplomatic headquarters on freehold land in this country and without restriction of area. That is a very important point. We must see at least that the area is restricted and that a diplomatic community is not allowed to spring up in any part of the country.

Then, is the same freedom or the same right of access to be extended to this country by the foreign nations? I am inclined to think that we have rushed into this matter blindly. We must give the matter careful consideration and especially bear in mind the attitude of other countries to us, particularly those countries under Communist domination. We must be particularly careful in regard to Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Argentina. What concessions are we to get from them in return for the concessions we are willing to give them? We give carte blanche authority to every country in the world to establish its consular or diplomatic headquarters on freehold land in Australia. That will have to be resisted until we have adequate assurances on the point not only from our own Attorney-General but from our experts on constitutional law. We must see that this country is adequately protected in this regard.

Mr. LUCKINS (Maree) (3.3 p.m.): A Bill of this kind is new to the State of Queensland and I take it that it will be in conformity with similar Bills introduced in the other States and the Commonwealth itself. During the past few years very important developments have taken place throughout the world. For many years Australia was not officially represented in foreign countries but today the Commonwealth, in the exercise of its powers outside Australia, will require to have diplomatic representatives in foreign countries, and for that purpose it will be necessary for the Commonwealth to obtain real property for its buildings. I agree with the remarks of the hon. member for West Moreton, the hon. member for Sandgate and the hon. member for Mundingburra. The matter will have to be straightened out now; there is no use complaining later on. I feel that there will be many complications besetting the Commonwealth and the States in regard to it.

Australia has the highest, the best and the clearest title to land of any country in the world. In Queensland we have the title of fee simple and the Torrens system of titles, both of which give a clear and definite ownership to land, reserving rights only to the Crown. We have also the perpetual leasehold title, and now we propose to give representatives of foreign Governments the right to hold land in this country for diplomatic and consular purposes and under the same

title as applies to land held by subjects of this country, reserving rights, I hope, to the Crown—which is the Government.

It may come about in this State, and in other States, that a foreign country will acquire and hold under this Bill land that may be urgently required for Government or public purposes. I should like a provision inserted in this Bill—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order! The hon. member knows he can amend the Bill in detail at the Committee stage, and at this stage it is only permissible to discuss the principles of the Bill.

Mr. LUCKINS: I do not see any provision made for that in this Bill.

Mr. SPEAKER: The time to make that provision is not on the second reading.

Mr. LUCKINS: I do not wish to move any amendment, but I want to point out to the Attorney-General this fact, as he may have some provision in this Bill to provide for the resumption of land held by a foreign power that is required for the general benefit of the community. Now is the time to discover any anomalies in the Bill. Further, we should be granted reciprocal rights in those countries that desire to acquire land for official purposes in this State. We are giving those nations who desire it a good clear title to their land, free of certain taxes and conditions, which is a privilege in itself.

Mr. MORRIS (Enoggera) (3.7 p.m.): I want to support the remarks made by the hon. member for Sandgate. When the question of reciprocal arrangements with other countries was raised, I spoke to the Attorney-General to see whether that had not been provided for. I thought it had. Further study, however, revealed to me that it is not covered at all. In passing a Bill like this, which is a very remarkable one and contains only a few clauses with very extensive possibilities, it is not wise to introduce it one day and on the next put it through its second-reading, Committee and third-reading stages. Every hon. member should have an opportunity of studying its implications, and the legal members of the House should have an opportunity of expressing their opinion on it.

There is another aspect of this Bill that is rather disturbing. From my own reading of it I cannot see that there is any limit whatsoever to the size of the area that can be occupied by any foreign power. Russia has been mentioned as an example. There is no provision in this Bill to prevent Russia from coming here and taking up an area of any size she wants, nor is there any provision to prevent any foreign country from acquiring an official property in Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns or anywhere else. It is not to be for diplomatic and consular purposes only; it can be acquired for official purposes. That covers too wide a field and should be restricted. As I am reminded by the hon. member for Sandgate, she could acquire hundreds of sites throughout the State.

Mr. Maher: And hundreds of spies.

Mr. MORRIS: Of course she could. The provision is too wide altogether to give to any nation.

I know there are many nations friendly to us at present, but do we know whether that friendship will exist in two or three or 10 or 12 years' time? It is absurd to open wide the door like this to any nation, to enable it to do exactly what Germany did some years ago. We know that Germany then looked forward 10 or 12 years, and sent out her agents to infiltrate throughout the country. This is a dangerous Bill. I ask the Attorney-General to hold up its further passage until hon members have had a further opportunity of studying it, and until they are certain that they will not be passing legislation that would be of much detriment to the country.

Motion (Mr. Gledson) agreed to.

COMMITTEE.

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Mann, Brisbane, in the chair.)

Clause 1—Short title—as read, agreed to.

Clause 2—Purposes for which foreign Governments may hold land—

Mr. MAHER (West Moreton) (3.11 p.m.): I regret that the Attorney-General did not extend to us the courtesy of a reply to the representations that were made on the second reading.

Mr. Gledson: We cannot deal with the Bill clause by clause on the second reading.

Mr. MAHER: You could deal with the points raised.

Mr. Gledson: Any explanation you want now will be given.

Mr. MAHER: I do not want to repeat what I said a while ago. I raised the important point as to what reciprocal arrangements have been agreed to between the Commonwealth and foreign countries that wish to come here and acquire freehold land for the purpose of establishing diplomatic, consular and official buildings for the purposes of their representation here. The point I want to have cleared up by the Attorney-General is whether anything is provided in the Commonwealth legislation that exists whereby no foreign country can acquire freehold land in Australia unless it is prepared to grant a similar concession to the Australian Government if they wish to acquire land in that country.

An important point also was raised by the hon. member for Enoggera regarding the great number of foreign countries, in many of which Australia might not wish to have representation. Recently, the Minister will recollect the Commonwealth Government decided to recall certain consular and ambassadorial representatives who were sent to certain States because they were burning up dollars fast in those States and not giving any useful representation to Australia in those countries. How do we know that those countries may not

wish for some purpose or other—possibly ulterior—to acquire land in this country? If they got the right to come here and acquire large acreages of land they could establish foreign centres in the midst of this country. With the extension of communistic imperialism throughout the world today a great number of European States have come under communistic government. Servile States have been established in a great number of European countries that have high culture and great traditions in the past and how do we know that this system is not going to extend and that those puppet countries of Russia are not going to ask the right to acquire freehold land in this country and establish official institutes here that might not be connected with ordinary diplomatic relationship at all, nor connected with trading relationships, but rather designed to house a great staff of spies to operate in this country and serve the interests of a major power although ostensibly representing the smaller power? That is a very great danger. There may be more in this Bill than appears to the unsuspecting eye of the Attorney-General.

I have no doubt he has introduced this legislation at the request of the Commonwealth Government. We know the Chifley Government are friendly and co-operative with the Communist Party in Australia.

Mr. Aikens: Ah!

Mr. MAHER: Absolutely. Passports can be secured for leading Communists to go to Belgrade, Moscow, the United States of America and Canada with the greatest of ease. Mr. Chifley regards them with a most benevolent eye. How do we know that this Bill has not been inspired and asked for by the Communist Party in Australia at the behest of some foreign power with whom we may be at war before very long? These are things we must think about. These are dangerous days but the Attorney-General cannot realise these things. He may have accepted without question this Bill from the Commonwealth Government and be prepared to carry it through without hanging up any question marks. There are important aspects to this Bill and we are living in a dangerous world. We are throwing the door wide open to any foreign power, big or small, to come in and acquire freehold land in this country.

There is no limitation in the Bill as to the number of properties that can be acquired by a foreign power; they are not limited to Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide or Perth. There is nothing to stop them from being carried through to Cairns, Townsville and other large provincial cities in the Commonwealth and these official centres of foreign countries could become regular beehives for espionage and other subversive activities on the part of a foreign power. The thing is loaded with dynamite and I ask the Attorney-General to hasten slowly with the Bill. It might be advisable to withdraw it this afternoon and recommit it as a later stage to give Parliament an opportunity to make inquiries in other directions to see what we are doing and not to fall into a supreme blunder that we might

pay for very dearly before very much time has elapsed. That is the important point I raised on the second reading but the Attorney-General, who is entitled to close the debate with a reply, failed to do so. These arguments are serious and call for a fair answer from the Attorney-General. If he has other information that can help us come to a sound conclusion on the Bill, let us have it. I have not heard him either on the initiation or second-reading stage give us any assurance. Anyhow, irrespective of what assurance he gives we are bound by the Bill and once it goes through, with the approval of the Governor in Council a foreign power has the right to acquire land in Queensland. It may acquire plenty of land in Queensland. Where is the limitation? We should like to hear something about that now from the Attorney-General.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (3.19 p.m.): I find it difficult to follow the hon. member and see the boggy he raises. He seems to be able to find a boggy in everything. He was very keen to commend Russia for the part she was playing in the World War as an ally of Britain and her dominions and it ill becomes him to speak of Russia in the way he is doing today. It may not be very long before we have to call on her help again and be very glad to get it.

Mr. Maher: You are out of touch with world events.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. GLEDSON: If the hon. member can see great big bogies coming along to swamp up Australia, we cannot.

The clause with which we are dealing sets out the purposes for which land can be held by foreign countries. It is provided definitely that the land shall be held only for consular purposes, for official residences of any accredited agent of that Government, and for all or any number of those purposes. It is stated in clear language and requires no legal interpretation.

The next clause puts the whole control in the hands of the Governor in Council. The Governor in Council determines who shall hold the land and who shall be an accredited person. Authority is given to the Governor in Council, by the Attorney-General or other Minister, to declare that these people are accredited and that they are fit people to hold land. The whole thing is in the hands of our own Government. The Bill merely gives the Governor in Council power to grant these people rights to hold title to land. There is no need for any legal man to delve into the matter. The clause is quite plain. I do not know what state of affairs would develop if we had to delay the business of Parliament simply because the Opposition asked us to wait until their legal luminaries can come along and interpret the Bill for them.

Mr. Maher: There is no necessity to push the Bill through all its stages today.

Mr. Morris: It would be different if you would only introduce the Bills and give us time to study them. You brought down 12 Bills yesterday and you are rushing them all through today.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask hon. members to allow the hon. gentleman to make his speech without interruption.

Mr. GLEDSON: Before the Government of any country outside Australia or before any accredited agent of that Government acquires, pursuant to this Bill, any estate or interest in any land whether freehold or leasehold from the Crown in Queensland, it or he shall satisfy the Governor in Council that such land is required for a purpose or purposes specified in clause two. If so satisfied, the Governor in Council may, by order in council, authorise such Government or accredited agent to hold such estate or interest in land for such purpose or purposes. The clause is perfectly clear.

Mr. Macdonald: How are you going to police it?

Mr. GLEDSON: There will be no need to police it because the Governor in Council has the first, last and only say in the matter. If a country has a consular agent or other person coming here to act as intermediary between that country and this for the purpose of trading or dealing in any way, we have the say as to whether such person shall hold land as the accredited agent or whether his Government shall hold it. There is nothing ambiguous about it. It is as plain as a pikestaff and any hon. member who cannot see it should get new spectacles.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (3.25 p.m.): I think that the Attorney-General has put some gloss over this matter which does not polish up as highly as our satisfaction requires at any rate. I cannot discuss the following clause, which gives the right to any accredited country to acquire land in the State and come under the Land Act and hold the same rights of occupation as we British subjects hold. As pointed out, if this was limited to a site for the particular purpose, that would be some restriction in itself. But accredited agents today might be our enemies tomorrow. We are men of the world and we have seen the tactics adopted by other countries over the past few years and we have to realise that a country can appear friendly on the surface but underneath can infiltrate and disturb the peace of another country, for complete occupation eventually. That can be done not by force of arms but by intrigue.

The Minister himself professes a kind regard and apparent respect for Russia. There is the danger because if he has that respect there is no reason why that country cannot establish a diplomatic and consular office in Brisbane and hold freehold land. For purposes of convenience, the consular office might want branches at Toowoomba, Mackay, Cairns and all over the State. Anything can happen in these institutions which are given private domicile in our land to carry out any scheme, subversive or not.

We have all to recognise the danger of Communism. It is to be noted that we had it stressed in the House only a few days ago by the Government; today they throw out a free hand to Russia. I say that in Australia we have a Russian diplomatic service of some 42 or more diplomats who have the freedom and run of this country and who attend the Commonwealth Parliament at the request of the Prime Minister and his Cabinet and they are given every facility outside to develop friendliness. Under our own roof Russia is breeding Communism; she is breeding it in all countries. We shut our eyes to the Chinese struggle and what is happening in Mongolia. Is that country to be a Communist country with Russian backing? We have these countries following one another. We know what happened in Canada, where the Communism was traced to Russia; look at the action taken by the Canadian Government. In this country of Australia we are giving them an "open go," we are blind to the menace; we pretend not to recognise it. Diplomats can be accredited today and discredited tomorrow. And so we have to be careful as to how far we go. We are pressing for a limitation in this State at any rate.

The objection I take is to area because these diplomats can spread their tentacles anywhere. I doubt whether the Attorney-General can show otherwise, so long as they have the permission of the Governor in Council. If the Governor in Council is so friendly towards Russia as the Minister professes to be, can he turn down a request by the Russian Consular Office to establish a branch at Townsville, Cairns and other strategic positions in our State? No, he would be afraid of offending Russia.

That is where we fail. When we recognise the terror they are to us we should be cautious. We can be friendly with friendly nations, but we should be careful just the same. We should put up our guard, not open it, otherwise foreign powers may trespass on our soil and eventually become our enemies. If we are patriots, we shall acclaim the fact that our country comes first, and our legislation should be designed to that end. We should not introduce legislation that will tend to weaken our defence. There is no limitation of area in the Bill; indeed, it is an open sesame to all countries of the world to come here to carry out whatever tactics they deem fit, friendly or unfriendly.

Mr. MAHER (West Moreton) (3.32 p.m.): I should like to ask the Minister what is the background for this Bill. Where did the application for this legislation come from? Did it originate with this Government, or did the request for it emanate from Canberra?

Mr. Gledson: Yes, it emanated from Canberra. All consular and diplomatic matters emanate from Canberra. You ought to know that.

Mr. MAHER: I know that, but the Minister did not explain that the Commonwealth Government had asked the various States to pass similar legislation.

Mr. Gledson: Yes, I did, yesterday.

Mr. MAHER: That is the background to it—the request came from the Commonwealth Government. Does the Minister know what applies at present in the Federal Capital Territory? Are foreign Governments given the right to acquire freehold land at Canberra itself at the present time?

Mr. Gledson: I do not think the law provides for any freehold land at Canberra.

Mr. MAHER: Can they acquire leasehold land there?

Mr. Gledson: Yes.

Mr. MAHER: A foreign power can acquire leasehold land from the Commonwealth Government at Canberra now? I know now where it came from—it came from Canberra. Obviously the Minister is out of touch with the fast-moving world events today when he speaks of having friendly relations with Russia. Nobody wants to fight with Russia, but Russia is imposing her will on Europe, and will do so on the rest of the world in the same way as Hitler tried to do. It is not that we want to be unfriendly with Russia, but Russia refuses to be friendly with us.

If the Attorney-General were to read the speeches of Mr. Attlee, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Churchill and Mr. Herbert Morrison, he would know that they are greatly concerned now about Russia, but here we are asked to give an open cheque through the Governor in Council in regard to any application by a foreign power to acquire freehold or leasehold land within the territory of Queensland. The Governor in Council has the final determination in that respect. The hon. member for Sandgate has pointed out that there are no limitations contained in the Bill, that it is entirely a matter for decision by the State Governor in Council. If a foreign power is able to impress itself on the good will of the Governor in Council, very obviously it will have the right to acquire freehold land in this city and freehold land in every large provincial city in the State.

At 3.35 p.m.,

Mr. DEVRIES (Gregory) relieved the Chairman in the chair.

The Bill does not impose any limitation in that respect. This clause gives an open cheque for the signature of the Governor in Council.

Again, no provision is contained in the Bill for any bargaining with the foreign power concerned. Would the Governor in Council give a foreign power this right without stipulating that Queensland should have a similar right in the country of the foreign power concerned? There is no guarantee to Parliament that any such bargaining will be entered into. Too much is left to the decision of the Governor in Council—a secret place of meeting—and not enough is left to the frankness and openness of Parliament. That is the point. Who knows what sort of Ministry we may have in Queensland as time proceeds? We can depend on good loyal men in Cabinet now but who knows what the future may bring? Too much power is given to the Governor in Council.

Mr. Morris: The Governor in Council may be as easily hoodwinked as he was over the Mackay town-planning scheme.

Mr. MAHER: Exactly.

Even if the Governor in Council decided to grant the right to some foreign power to acquire freehold land in this State and then for some reason or other refuses to grant a similar privilege to another foreign power one can readily see how international unfriendliness and misunderstanding can arise. It could easily lead to a great deal of trouble. That is how danger can come in. I want to be on good terms with even Russia. We do not want to make war with any country in our lifetime. In the past wars have been imposed on us and we have had to defend ourselves. If we grant this right to any friendly power to acquire land in Queensland then get a flood of applications from lesser European countries under the domination of Russia, and lesser nations throughout the world, how can we logically refuse them the same right as we have given a friendly power? Therein we lay up a whole heap of trouble for ourselves.

I do not like the Bill in any respect whatever. It would have been far better to leave it alone. I do not think it matters to any country whether it acquires freehold land or leases premises for its representatives. The Commonwealth Government have leased property in various foreign countries from time to time and that practice seems to have served their purpose very well. Therefore, there is no real security of tenure in freehold or leasehold in a foreign country because if we were involved in war with that country what would be the value of it? Supposing we went to Moscow and spent half-a-million in the acquisition of land and buildings in the capital cities of Russia and subsequently we were at war with Russia, where is our investment of half-a-million? I say it confers very little security on any country but on the other hand can lead to a great deal of difficulty and misunderstanding if, having granted the right to some countries, we refuse it to others. This is a Bill that has many thorny sides to it. I do not like it and I do not like leaving the whole powers of concession to the Governor in Council when certain limited powers should be vested in this Parliament.

Clause 2, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 3 and 4, as read, agreed to.

Clause 5—Immunity from land tax and rates—

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (3.40 p.m.): This is the clause on which there is doubt regarding reciprocity. The Attorney-General contends that there is a reciprocal arrangement, that countries holding land in Australia under this Bill must give us the same rights in their own countries when it becomes law. There is no mention of reciprocal treatment here at all except for the specific purposes mentioned, such as land tax or rates. I do not claim to be a lawyer, but I should like the Attorney-General to show me how this

clause provides for a reciprocal arrangement between this State and any other country that will establish itself here under the provisions in this Bill. I maintain that a country can come here under this Bill and acquire areas, either freehold or leasehold, and establish consular agencies, yet we may be barred by those countries from establishing our agencies in their countries. The Bill does not say that we have the right to establish ourselves in those countries to which we grant this right, with the exception that if they grant exemption from land tax and rates to our consular agent we can do the same here. Otherwise, there is no reciprocal arrangement.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (3.44 p.m.): I do not know what the hon. member is talking about.

Mr. Decker: No, you would not.

Mr. GLEDSON: No, and I do not think he knows himself. This clause deals only with a specific matter—reciprocity in land taxes and rates.

Mr. MAHER: It does not provide for reciprocity.

Mr. GLEDSON: It provides for reciprocity.

Mr. Maher: No, it does not; read it over.

Mr. GLEDSON: I will read it—

“Where the Governor in Council is satisfied that any land held in any country outside the Commonwealth by, or by an accredited agent of, the Government of the Commonwealth for any diplomatic, consular, or official purpose of the Commonwealth, is, by virtue of being so held, wholly or partially immune from all or any of the taxes and rates . . .”

They have a similar reciprocity here as far as our rates and taxes are concerned.

Mr. Maher: You are right.

Mr. GLEDSON: The hon. member for Sandgate gets up and asks me whether I can read something else into it. I cannot read into the clause any more than is in the clause and it deals with that particular matter alone, rates and taxes and reciprocity for them.

Mr. DECKER (Sandgate) (3.45 p.m.): That is exactly the admission I was desiring to obtain. As the debate went on we were given to understand that this clause covered the reciprocal arrangement. We find that under this agreement we are giving foreign powers the right to come here under these conditions, but we have not the same right to establish agencies in their country. This is a one-sided arrangement, which is what the Commonwealth Government do all the time—all give and no take. This is a very great weakness. If we give concessions to Russia here, Russia should give us the same concessions there. I guarantee that whatever concessions we give to that country in Australia we shall not have the right to establish our diplomatic agents there under the same conditions; consequently, why should we grant them these conditions? It is madness for us

not to realise our position, and give ourselves some protection instead of surrendering this right to other countries. If it is for the purpose of establishing friendly relations, such relationships might extend only for a matter of months or even weeks.

Clause 5, as read, agreed to.

Clause 6—Extent of application of State law—

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (3.46 p.m.): The hon. member for Mundingburra raised the question whether any person could make sanctuary of the official residences of the consular agents; in other words, whether such official diplomatic or consular residences gave sanctuary to any person who sheltered therein. The clause is very clear as it states—

“The Government of any country outside the Commonwealth or any accredited agent of that Government shall in respect of any land held by it or him pursuant to this Act have and enjoy all rights and privileges which would be had and enjoyed by a private person if such land were held by such private person but, subject to the foregoing provisions of this section, and to the provisions of section five hereof, no right, privilege, or immunity excepting such rights, privileges, and immunities as by law or custom are accorded to diplomatic, consular, and official representatives of countries outside the Commonwealth, their families and employees, shall attach to, arise out of, or be claimable by any person whomsoever by reason of the holding by the Government of any country outside the Commonwealth or any accredited agent of that Government of any land in Queensland.

“Moreover subject to observing all such rights, privileges, and immunities as are by law or custom accorded to diplomatic, consular, and official representatives of countries outside the Commonwealth, their families and employees, all laws of this State shall, except as otherwise provided under this Act, be enforceable and may be enforced with respect to such land and persons and things therein or thereon to the same extent as such laws would be enforceable and could be enforced if such land were held by a private person.”

Mr. Decker: This is the Father Christmas clause.

Mr. GLEDSON: The hon. member might be able to draw Father Christmas out of it, but I do not think he can. I cannot find any loophole that gives any person any right to hold land outside this Bill. That is all that it gives to them, and then under the authority of the Governor in Council first of all. He must be satisfied that the land will be held for the particular purpose of an official residence and subject thereto the land is held under the laws, customs and conditions of Queensland and the laws of Queensland will be enforceable against any person in or on that land or in connection with the house on that land. The thing is perfectly clear. No-one can get

immunity or sanctuary. If he breaks any law of our country the law is enforceable against him, as it is against any private individual.

If people come here and live under and obey our laws it does not matter what country they come from so long as they are friendly. If they break the laws of the land they will be in no different position from an ordinary private citizen of this country.

Mr. AIKENS (Mundingsburra) (3.51 p.m.): I have no doubt that the Attorney-General has consulted his legal advisers on this matter and I am prepared to accept the interpretation he has given. I read the clause carefully before I spoke on the second reading and was rather perturbed at the specific application of the words.

“all laws of this State shall, except as otherwise provided under this Act, be enforceable and may be enforced with respect to such land and persons and things therein or thereon to the same extent as such laws would be enforceable and could be enforced if such land were held by a private person.”

I am not a legal man and certainly have only a very sketchy knowledge of Commonwealth and international law, but I raised the question from the point of view of the extradition law. As far as I know, the extradition law is something outside the State and the Commonwealth; it is an international law agreed to by certain nations throughout the world at an international conference. If the Attorney-General is prepared to implement his interpretation of the law then I have no doubt everyone here will be satisfied. For instance, if some foreign country comes to Queensland, buys an area of land, and establishes a building on that land, and some local criminal runs onto that land and seeks sanctuary, then if the Attorney-General is prepared to put his interpretation on the law into effect and say to the police of this State, “Never mind about their conception of sanctuary as embodied in this law; go in and pinch that bloke and we will deal with him and let them argue about the constitutional or international aspect of the law,” I shall be quite satisfied.

Mr. Gledson: I can assure you that we shall ask the police to go in and arrest him.

Mr. AIKENS: That is all I am concerned about. I am not concerned about the families or relatives of consular officials; I am only concerned about the very ticklish question of sanctuary. If the Attorney-General is prepared to implement his interpretation of the law, so that if anyone at any time seeks sanctuary in one of these places the Attorney-General will go in and get him, that is all I want.

Clause 6, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

THIRD READING

Bill on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a third time.

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES ACTS AMENDMENT BILL.

SECOND READING.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (3.55 p.m.): I move—

“That the Bill be now read a second time.”

This is a short Bill to amend the Friendly Societies Act, and it deals with only a few principles. The first is the insertion of the words “four pounds” instead of the words “forty shillings” as the limit of benefits. This amendment brings the rule into line with the amending Bill of last year. It was omitted at the time.

The second amendment is in connection with burials. A person carrying on a funeral-benefit business might, on the performance of a funeral in respect of the death of any nominated person mentioned in a group contract, cancel such contract irrespective of the total amount of contributions paid. Upon the death of a child named in the contract, such contract could be cancelled notwithstanding that the cost of the funeral for a child under 10 is limited by the principal Act to £5. The proposed amendment is to remove this defect. Such amendment provides that any sum contributed in excess of £5 in respect of a group contract shall be credited to the account of such contract.

Mr. NICKLIN (Murrumba—Leader of Opposition) (3.58 p.m.): The second principle of the Bill is the one in which I am interested; I am not so much concerned with the first one. I well remember that in the debate on funeral benefits that occurred when the previous amendment to the Act was going through, there was a fair amount of discussion of the £5 set down for a child's funeral. It was pointed out that the amount did not cover the cost of the funeral. The opinion of the Acting Attorney-General at the time was that the friendly society might make a loss on the burial of a child but it could recoup itself on the profits made on the burials of adults. I understand that different types of contracts are entered into by these societies with their subscribers. Some more or less cover the family, and others cover only particular members of the family. I should have liked the Attorney-General to give us more detailed information in regard to the matter. He gave very sketchy information in regard to the whole thing. If I remember correctly, in the original Bill the contract taken by the principal societies provided for the burial of any children, particularly children under 10, without any effect whatever on the general contract entered into between the subscriber and the company.

At the moment it seems that there has been some alteration, that some of these societies have endeavoured to cancel the contracts on the provision of any burial even though it may have been only that of a child, for which they are allowed the sum of £5. I do not think that was intended by the Act.

When we come to examine the position of the societies we can see that particularly two of them have accumulated large sums of money to the credit of their funds. A report to Parliament discloses that a sum of £112,000 is held at the Treasury as deposits from these companies and it also indicates that the funds are accumulating. It is a pity that the Attorney-General did not explain the difference in the contracts that apparently has brought about the need for the measure. I remember that when the Act was going through the contracts provided that the burial of children did not in any way alter the contract that had been entered into. If there has been any practice—and apparently there has—whereby these contracts are wiped out on the burial of a child involving the payment of a sum of £5, it is time the position was tightened up.

However, it must not be forgotten that immediately a contributor pays 6s 6d. he is entitled to any benefits that may accrue under the contract. Perhaps some of the contracts that have been wiped out have been those where the contributors have paid 6s., 7s., or 8s. and have had a burial carried out at a cost of £5. Whether there have been cases where contracts have been wiped out after the contributors had paid less than £5 or more than £5 is a matter that the Attorney-General did not explain. However, at the Committee stage we may be able to get fuller information from the Attorney-General on the point. Apparently the Bill is designed to prevent some companies from failing to carry out their obligations and we must agree with that principle.

Hon. D. A. GLEDSON (Ipswich—Attorney-General) (4.3 p.m.): In some cases a child has died and the funeral carried out but under the provisions of the Act as it now stands the contract can be cancelled although a certain amount has been paid in. The object of the Bill is that the contracts shall not be cancelled. In some cases more than £5 was paid in and any sum in excess of the £5 will now be credited to the funeral fund and the contract will go on with that amount to credit. If the whole of the sum is taken out or if the contributor has paid less than £5 or just the £5 the fund will be debited and the contributor will have to take out a new contract. The whole purpose of the Bill is to keep any amount in excess of £5 standing to the credit of the fund.

Motion (Mr. Gledson) agreed to.

COMMITTEE.

(Mr. Devries, Gregory, in the chair.)

Clauses 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

THIRD READING.

Bill, on motion of Mr. Gledson, read a third time.

The House adjourned at 4.7 p.m.